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Boston Globe publishes details of several secret NSA projects

BOSTON (UPI) — The Boston Globe published details yesterday of several projects convicted spy Ronald Pelton alluded to during his espionage trial in Baltimore.

The article appeared despite government threats of prosecution under a 1950 law forbidding publication of communications intelligence.

The Globe said the information was "all previously in the public domain." The newspaper said it omitted "a number of important technical details about [Project A] and has described others only in general terms" under an agreement with "senior U.S. intelligence officials" cited as sources.

Excerpts from the Globe article follow:

"Project A," or "Ivy Bells" — "According to sources, the program involved the use of U.S. Navy submarines, creeping into Soviet waters at great risk, to facilitate eavesdropping on an undersea communications system."

"With the help of a high-technology device, identified by Pelton in trial testimony this week as a 'recording system,' U.S. satellites orbiting in space were privy to top-secret Soviet communications."

"[It] allowed the United States to intercept messages that Soviet submarines sent to military command posts ashore when they returned to their harbors after sea cruises. Among other things, the messages included information about where the Soviet subs had been and what they had done."

"The descriptions [of 'Project A' previously disclosed] by NBC and the [Washington] Post are similar in some respects to those of a forerunner program, code-named 'Holystone,' that was detailed in 1975 by The New York Times ... involving the use of Navy submarines inside the Soviet Union's 3-mile limit to collect vital data on the capabilities and missile-firing abilities of Soviet submarines."

"According to the Times, the U.S. subs 'were able to plug into Soviet land communication cables strewn across the ocean bottom and thus were able to intercept high-level military messages and other communications considered too important to be sent by radio or other less secure means.'

"Thanks to technological breakthroughs, however, such communications can now be intercepted and relayed back to the United States without U.S. submarines having to remain in the area. The marriage of

existing technology to advances in electronics and the growing sophistication of U.S. satellites orbiting far above the Earth led to development of the project Pelton compromised."

"Pelton, according to Globe sources, told the Soviets how the messages were intercepted and relayed to the high technology device, which in turn relayed the information to a satellite, which transmitted it to NSA [National Security Agency]."

"Also, according to Globe sources, and as the Post has already reported, the Soviet debriefing of Pelton led them to retrieve the device and compromise the program."

"Like Holystone, its predecessor program, the project compromised by Pelton required U.S. submarines to enter Soviet waters. In the later program, the subs did not have to stay."

"Project B" — "According to the sources, the second program involves a supercomputer so well known that its capability has been accurately detailed in a best-selling novel, and an intelligence-collection satellite. But that satellite was replaced last year by a newer model."

"It has been referred to at the trial only as 'valuable information about how quickly the United States is able to process and evaluate information' and 'the upgrading of the actual

equipment that collects Soviet signals.'

"According to the sources, those are references to the satellite that has been replaced and to the Cray supercomputer that millions of readers have learned about from Tom Clancy's 1984 novel, 'The Hunt For Red October'... [and] through the large number of unclassified publications Clancy used in his research."

"The Cray, according to these widely available publications, is used by the Navy as well as by the NSA to integrate and process data from disparate systems that include intercepted communications and the 'SOSUS' underwater sensor system that is designed to detect and track Soviet submarines."

"Thanks to that technology, much of which the government considers highly classified, the U.S. Navy is able to locate the wayward Soviet submarine and bring it, along with its classified Soviet secrets, to port, while the Soviet Navy is frustrated in efforts to find its own submarine."

"Among other elements of the undersea surveillance system, Clancy cites the existence of the Cray, so powerful that it can process and analyze millions of bits of data from oceans that have been seeded with sophisticated sensing devices to detect Soviet submarine movements."